

Interview with Robert C. Foulon

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

ROBERT C. FOULON

Interviewed by: Arthur Tienken

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This is Arthur Tienken. I am interviewing, about to interview Robert C. Foulon who was our first Charg# in Lusaka, Zambia in 1965 on behalf of the Foreign History Center of George Washington University. It is April 22, 1988.

Q: Bob, you first arrived in Lusaka when?

FOULON: In mid 1963 as a Consul and a Principal Officer.

Q: I gather from what you said that you were in effect an independent post reporting directly to Washington. Is that correct?

FOULON: That's correct, except for administrative matters.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about how you got into the Foreign Service; what interested you to decide to enter the Foreign Service? Secondly, I know that you spent a considerable amount of time in Africa, why did you become so interested in Africa?

FOULON: It's a big question Art. I entered the Foreign Service in 1947. Before the war I was in Law School out at The University of Illinois and I got quickly disillusioned with the interest that I had in Law. At the same time I heard about the Foreign Service. Out in

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Illinois they thought that the Department of State was located in Springfield, literally. I had always been interested in maps and things international, and so I immediately said that's for me.

My first post was Paris, and then Germany, and then the Philippines and I came back to the Philippine desk. After a while there I heard from a good friend of mine, Peter Hooper, that the African bureau was recruiting some people to open new posts. It sounded like a very interesting thing to me and I went around and saw Fred Hadsel and Red Duggan. As I recall Red Duggan was the first man to specialize in African affairs in the Foreign Service, having taken some special courses at a University, I'm not sure which one.

A small correction, at that time I think the African bureau had not been formally constituted; it was still a branch of NEA but everybody expected it to become a bureau. At any rate they recruited me to open the post in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon. I prepared for that and went out there with a very minimum staff. My number two officer, and only other officer, was Walter Cutler who has since had a most distinguished career. I also had a husband and wife pair who were the administrative officer and secretary; and that was the entire staff! I spent two years there, two fascinating years leading up to independence. Since Cameroon was a trust territory we were very much involved in the politics of all of this, which I can go into in further detail later if you wish.

After that, I went to Harvard for a year in Economic studies, and then back to the African bureau in various jobs. Then at that time the affairs of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland were becoming very politically interesting and independence seemed to be in the offing, at least for several of the separate states of that Federation. I was asked by the then Deputy Assistant Secretary Wayne Fredericks to go out and beef up and really literally open up a post in Lusaka. This time I went out with the very able assistance of Larry Williamson, since then Ambassador in Gabon; and an administrative officer, secretary - communicator, and then eventually another political officer and a consular officer who also did some other matters that I can't easily recall right now. So it eventually

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built up to a post of about eight Americans excluding the USIA staff which had been there previously, and a very large AID staff as well which were located outside our particular suite of offices. After independence the consulate of course became an embassy and my title was then *Chargé d'Affaires*, I was there until Bob Good came to relieve me as the first Ambassador to Zambia.

Q: At that time before independence Bob, what was your connection if any with the American Consulate General in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia?

FOULON: Well, we depended on Salisbury for administrative backup and our administrative reports went through Salisbury and that was about it. The political situation in the two now countries was so different. There was very little byplay, we found it very nice to go down to Southern Rhodesia for vacations and that was about it.

Q: So you reported directly to Washington?

FOULON: Yes.

Q: And who in Washington besides Wayne was in effect was most interested in Northern Rhodesia at the time?

FOULON: Well of course the Assistant Secretary, Soapy Williams was very interested and the Office Director that I'll have to dredge up that name Art, I can't recall him off hand. I think the whole bureau was interested in Southern African affairs at this point, this was sort of toward the end of the — I guess the wave of independence was rolling south and people expected it to roll on further and further. In effect Zambia became the last one for a long time in this wave that started in 1960. Well it really started in 1957 with Ghana, I guess it was.

Q: What did you consider your major mission to be while you were in charge of the Consulate General?

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FOULON: Well one thing I remember in particular was that Deputy Assistant Secretary Fredericks had very warm connections with African leaders including Kenneth Kaunda and with many of the private organizations that were active out there, the American Friends and the copper companies and the many other private either non-profit or profit organizations. He gave me as one of my charges to try to help coordinate and support these people in their relations with the new African government at the time, and to improve American relations with the Africans at the official level. I remember that we got so busy doing all of that, that at one point we had an amusing incident where I wrote a letter to Wayne saying I thought that maybe we had pushed things as far as we should, and it crossed a letter from him saying that he thought maybe we had pushed things too far. So we quieted down then.

Q: Before independence of course Northern Rhodesia was the primary concern of the British which meant I assume that your contacts were essentially with the British hierarchy, and I suppose to an extent the Zambians who would become important after independence? Would you comment on that?

FOULON: Yes, our relations with the British were very cordial and friendly. I called on the Governor and then the new High Commissioner came from the colonial office. He proved to be a very friendly jolly type, but underneath all of this cordiality there was a certain amount of rivalry going on, and I remember one of the things that we struck upon that the Zambians seemed to want and that we could provide was some training for prospective diplomats for the new Zambian Foreign Service that was expected to come into being. We cooked up a very good program and the Zambians wanted to buy it, but somebody in the British High Commission thought that this should be the role for the United Kingdom. I gather from what I subsequently heard that there was a considerable tussle within the British High Commission over how to handle this.

Q: Did we in fact ever do that?

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FOULON: Yes we did, I think that we trained about half a dozen of them.

Q: I wondered because I remember since I was in Elisabethville at the time in Katanga in Zaire, that there was assigned to the British High Commission at the branch office there, a Zambian taking training.

FOULON: Yes, I think that they provided some too now that you remind me.

Q: Bob, in the days before independence there was a variety of different experiences on the part of some of our posts with regard to contact of the Africans who were to become leaders after independence.

What did you feel that Washington wanted you to do with regard to contact with the Zambians themselves, and how did the British react?

FOULON: The Department wanted us to establish as close relations as we possibly could with all the leaders and potential leaders among the Africans. We had very little trouble doing that, there was no prevention on the part of the Africans themselves; no limitations on getting around the country or meeting or calling on people. The British made nothing of it as far as I can recall. They accepted it as normal and I can't recall even a cocked eye on it.

Q: Good! So you were able to get around the country very easily?

FOULON: Oh yes, very easily. We traveled everywhere really, I even took a little nip into Angola once.

Q: How did you find the Zambians then?

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FOULON: The Zambians varied quite a bit from region to region and tribe to tribe and so forth. Some were rather distant and reserved, others were far more open. By and large they were very friendly people and we had very little trouble getting along with them.

Q: Did they seem susceptible to American contacts?

FOULON: They were very susceptible at that time with one exception that I must tell you about and that was the Peace Corps. We had made no effort to talk about the Peace Corps whatsoever, but many of the Zambians - I can't remember who exactly but almost every important African leader told me that they weren't really interested in the Peace Corps. This led me to write a dispatch just simply reporting this — that with preparations for independence people had better be aware of the fact that there appeared to be a lack of interest or a disinterest in the Peace Corps. After I got back from the tour my friends in the Peace Corps told me that the then head of the Peace Corps Sargent Shriver took great umbrage at this dispatch, he thought I was trying to torpedo or sully the honor of the Peace Corps. They had to rise to my defense or otherwise I might have been removed from the post; that is what they told me, I'm not sure of the truth of the matter.

Q: In fact however, the Peace Corps did not go to Zambia. Is that correct because when I served there later there was no Peace Corps?

FOULON: As I recall that is correct. It is a good illustration of some of the problems of the Foreign Service, a minor one perhaps where an officer just automatically and honestly reports something not trying to make anything of it. Then it gets back into the political mill in Washington and a lot is made of it. It is politicized whereas it was not intended that way. Fortunately I had these old Foreign Service friends who were in the Peace Corps who were able to explain this to Mr. Shriver.

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Q: One of your major contacts among the Zambians must have been Kenneth Kaunda later to become first President of Zambia, and in fact is still President to this day. Was that correct, and if so how did you find your relations with him?

FOULON: Well I think the easiest way to convey that is that they were warm, cordial and candid, but I can't say that we established any personal friendship the way I had with the President of Cameroon. I never had any trouble getting to him, I never felt any compunctions about telling him what I thought and he was quite candid with me too, always very friendly.

Q: At that time he was what, the leader of UNIP [United National Independence Party]?

FOULON: He was the leader of UNIP, but by that time self government had been established. It was still under the British tutelage in terms of foreign affairs, military affairs and a few other reserved powers, but Kaunda was the Prime Minister of the state. It was still called Northern Rhodesia then, it didn't change to Zambia until independence.

Q: There was another political leader and another party of some substance at that time, I believe it was the African National Congress lead by Harry Nkumbula, did you also have contact with Harry?

FOULON: I called on him only once. I had a nice friendly, funny conversation with him. He was more an object of derision than anything else, except among his own people, the Tonga people. He came from the west, southwest as I remember.

Q: Were there any other figures among the Zambians of substance and stature at the time that you were able to deal with?

FOULON: Well the number two man in the party, the treasurer, was Simon Kapepwe who I think subsequently was jailed for trying to take over or something like that. Simon was basically the leader of the very strong northern tribe, the Bemba, who were the hard-nosed

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bullying types. Actually he lived right next door and our kids played together. I had very good relations with Simon, but I can't say that they were on the same intellectual plane as was Kaunda or some of the others.

Q: Kaunda if I remember correctly was not a Bemba, is that correct?

FOULON: Well that's the interesting thing about Kaunda; he was not a member of any Zambian tribe and that is why he was able to be the leader. He did not stir up tribal rivalries within the Lozi and the Tonga and the Bemba and other minor groups. The best educated and I thought in many ways the most forward-looking tribal bunch were the Lozi of the Zambezi Valley. My good friends there were the Wina brothers, [Arthur and Sikota]. The Wina brothers were the leaders of the Lozi at the time, I think their father had been the Latunga who was sort of the Prime Minister to the Tribal Chief of the Lozi who were an offshoot of the Zulus. Arthur Wina I think ended up as the Minister of Finance and Sikota Wina — who was quite a guy married to an American, a very beautiful American black — who was Minister of Information at the time. I had very good close relations with both of them, we were very close friends with them.

Q: The Zambians before independence were very interested in the issues or the course that lead to their independence, but they must have also begun to be interested in the situation in Southern Rhodesia as well. Could you comment on that, or were they really pre-occupied with just independence?

FOULON: Art, while I was there they were so preoccupied with their own coming of statehood and independence and getting their government started. I guess that I left within six months of independence so the Rhodesian matter really hadn't come to the fore. I think that they knew it would and they were obviously expecting that it might follow the same pattern that it had in Northern Rhodesia, but obviously it didn't.

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Q: You mentioned earlier Bob that you had USIA and AID in Lusaka at the time. What was our aid concerns, or what was AID primarily preoccupied with, do you recall?

FOULON: Mainly education. As I recall we established a College of Further education which was staffed by people from the University of California at San Luis Obispo and I think we had quite a lot to do with the setting up of the University of Zambia which is just outside of Lusaka. We were also involved with a few other incidental technical assistance type projects. I can't recall if any major amounts of money were involved in this because Zambia had so much copper wealth.

The major aid issue at the time of course was the creation or establishment of the Tanzam railroad from Dar es Salaam to Lusaka. A little historical background there helps understand this issue. The early development of Southern Africa and most of Africa I guess really was along lines of rail because that was the way that you set up transportation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. So in the African mind, rail meant development and development meant rails, you couldn't separate the two. Before independence even and just after they realized how dependent Zambia as a landlocked country was on railroads to get out it's copper. They realized that it had to either go through what was then The Congo controlled by the Belgians, or through Northern Rhodesia - Southern Rhodesia, sorry — still under a white government. There was another exit, the Bequa railway through Angola. They felt that they would be much more assured of a line of rail to export the copper if it could go down to Dar es Salaam.

I guess that Julius Nyerere pretty well persuaded Kaunda that he had to have this railroad. At the time many of the analysts in the copper companies and in the AID agency in Washington and elsewhere arrived at the conclusion and tried to persuade the Zambians that it was uneconomic to build this railway and that in times of emergency that it would be much cheaper and easier to have an all weather — I've forgotten now the technical term — a road not of a normal paved type, but over which all terrain vehicles of large massive character could carry out the copper. In this situation the British and we and the others

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— I guess the European Community E.C., was involved, dragged their feet on putting up the money to build the railroad. The Chinese came in and offered to build the railway and the Tanzanians and the Zambians took them up on this and they built what I gather was a pretty good railway. Even though you know more about the subsequent history of that railroad than I do I gather that it wasn't maintained very well and now can barely carry anything.

Q: That railway was built as you had stated a bit later by the Chinese. The road however was also built and that did involve American construction interests. Both of them became critical later as you remember during the oil crisis after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Southern Rhodesia. Had we begun anything on the road itself while you were still there?

FOULON: To my knowledge, no. One thing that I think I should report in this is that the only contretemps we had with Kaunda was over this Chinese project. At the time our relations with China were very bad indeed, as a matter of fact relations between Russia and China were very bad. I can remember going to cocktail parties where the Chinese and Russians would walk away from each other; the Russians would talk to me, but the Chinese would also walk away from me as well as the Russians. That is all by way of amusing background.

I was instructed by the Department to go in and warn Kaunda against dealing with the Chinese, and to almost insist that he not do so. I think at least twice or maybe three times I demurred and wired back to the Department that I thought this was a mistake, I sent copies of my cables all around the circuit in the area. I think some of my colleagues in the independent countries there — Ambassadors — agreed with me and may even have supported me with cables to Washington.

Finally I got a categorical instruction to do so - to remonstrate with Kaunda. I guess I was not as sophisticated as I might have been; I actually did remonstrate instead of sort

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of saying "Well Washington wants me to remonstrate," and Kaunda took it very much amiss and my relations cooled off for several months and they never really warmed up afterwards. I had to report this to Washington and I don't know what they made of it at the time, but they did not withdraw me at the time. My time was coming to an end anyhow, so there was no point in that; nevertheless, it was an unpleasant incident.

Q: You mentioned USIA, what were they up to while you were there? What could they do before independence?

FOULON: Well they were very good really at establishing contacts with what you might call the intellectual class among the Africans. There were quite a few well educated people in the country, a number of newspaper people, they had a very active library program and got around the country a fair amount. I thought that it was a very good program.

Q: This leads me to ask you, how did you find the caliber of your staff in general while you were there, including USIA and AID?

FOULON: Starting with USIA I thought that they were highly professional and very good; one could improve all the time, but I think given the nature of the post and so on I couldn't have asked for better. The AID staff was also quite professional, very good people. On operating under the usual restraints that AID people have to, I thought they did as good a job as could be expected.

The team from San Luis Obispo was particularly good in staffing the College of Further Education. My only complaint about staff really was my own administrative staff, which was very poor. It crippled us a good bit of times, I remember having to do the administration quite a bit myself on many important matters. My number two officer, Larry Williams, is a very distinguished officer who has had a very good career since then; and the others were quite competent.

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Q: We weren't the only other representation in Lusaka at the time other than the British. Were there other major representations on the part of other governments and did they have special interests of their own as far as Zambia was concerned?

FOULON: I think the next people to come were the Russians and they set up an office before independence. I remember it was originally staffed by a bright looking guy named Sinyitsin; we used to call him "Double Sin." He spoke English very well, he called on me a number of times and I always regret that I was too busy toward the end of my tour to have more time with him and learn more about him. They really were trying to learn and I think they were coming around to my office to see what they could learn about Zambia from me. I recall that they sent in some more senior people and I encountered them on some occasions walking down the street or the road, or whatever it was and stopped and chatted with them. They said, "Oh well you know we're Ukrainians, were not Russians;" which was an interesting thing for them to observe.

Then of course the Chinese came in and they oddly set up their residence on Leopards Hill Road directly opposite my residence, which caused some interest in certain quarters and I never had anything to do with them. I can't recall any other Western countries sending anyone. The French weren't there at the time, but there was a German but that was very late in the day in terms of my tenure. I can't even remember it very well.

Q: So essentially what you had was the British who had primary responsibility in the area, ourselves, and the Russians and the Chinese were there for their own reasons and very little else as far as outside influences?

FOULON: Yes, I guess thinking about it now you say that at that early stage Southern Africa was a maelstrom for great power politics that was beginning to show itself and manifest itself with the representational pattern.

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Q: How about living itself? Was life comfortable in Lusaka in those days, or were there logistical problems?

FOULON: I can't recall any logistic problems. I always thought that it was just about the best climate in the world, the only one that I have seen to rival it was my wife's home state in Western Australia where I also served. Getting around the country was a challenge at times as some of the roads were pretty bad, but that made it more adventurous. The game parks were very interesting, Williamson and I went hunting several times with some success. It was very hard work most of it, but also it was a pleasant place to be.

Q: Of course it was still part of the Federation of Rhodesia Nyasaland at the time up until the time of October 1964 so that contact at least with Southern Rhodesia was fairly normal and afterwards as well. If I remember correctly Zambia was landlocked much of what appeared in the stores; for example, came from outside of Zambia and primarily from the south. That was not a problem at that time I take it?

FOULON: No, not at all.

Q: You could go to Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia easily?

FOULON: Very easily indeed, I remember taking a couple of tours down there just to be a tourist.

Q: You mentioned at one point earlier the copper companies. One of the copper companies, not the one with the American name had a very strong American interest, was that correct?

FOULON: Yes, it was controlled by AMAX at the time which has since changed hands. They had British interests, about half of that was British interest as well and I can't remember the name of the British company. It was British and run by a very fine guy, but I can't remember his name right now.

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Q: Were there any Americans there as directly representing American Metals, do you remember? If so or if not, how did you find your relations with them?

FOULON: Them being the AMAX company? Relations with AMAX were very, very good. They came out and visited from time to time and they would be entertained; they had a hospitality house in Lusaka not far from my house and I was usually invited to those parties. The relations between the two main companies Roan Selection and Anglo-American were very good also and they would socialize together. I remember being served drinks by Harry Oppenheimer and other “big wheels” and listening in on the chats about the price of copper and all that sort of thing. It was pretty heady stuff.

Q: Anglo-American was the copper company that did not have an American interest and Harry Oppenheimer as you mentioned was in fact their; what do you call it, Chairman or Board Chairman or whatever?

FOULON: That's not entirely true. There are a lot of Anglo-American shares traded in New York and the Engelhard company owned a good bit of it and they were very close relations — maybe they were joint venture relations — but I think also Engelhard had a big block of Anglo-American shares and he appeared there to represent the President at the time of independence — Charlie Engelhard. I had a fine time with him — a very nice man. I remember that I had to go down to Salisbury to meet him there and accompany him up on the plane in order to warn him that he was going to get some hostility upon arrival. He hadn't been told this in the Department oddly enough and he got quite a little bit upset by this but he handled himself very well.

Q: Why the hostility?

FOULON: The hostility was because of his connections with South Africa and mine owners associated to some extent with apartheid and so forth.

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Q: So in fact the Zambians were conscious of the Southern African problem even then?

FOULON: That's right, obviously. Well a lot — you see I can't recall to what extent this is true — but there were quite a large number of leading Zambians that had been educated in schools in South Africa; some of them were actually raised in South Africa and so they were quite aware of the situation and of the meaning of Anglo-American and so forth.

Q: Were there other American interests in Zambia at the time, I assume that some missionaries at least were there?

FOULON: Oh, there were a few missionaries, there weren't really all that many American missionaries; business interests - almost none.

Q: Moving to the Independence Day itself, you were certainly a member of our delegation and then immediately became our first Charg# in Lusaka. Who headed our delegation, do you remember?

FOULON: That was Charlie Engelhard, it was Charlie Engelhard.

Q: Were there other visitors during your time of stature? Did Soapy Williams for example come to Lusaka while you were there?

FOULON: I'm sorry to say that I don't recall that he did, but Wayne Fredericks came through several times and I recall — I guess one should say now — that he would insist on calling on Kaunda personally without anybody else there. I guess there were times when this was appropriate and he usually would try to tell me a little bit about his conversations. There was always the aura that there was something private going on here and personally it didn't really affect my relations or operations; but I must say that it is disconcerting to a principal officer to have this sort of thing happen without any explanation.

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Q: Are you suggesting that not much got reported back to Washington as a result of any of these Fredericks - Kaunda conversations.

FOULON: No, I think it was very selective and I must say I have the distinct impression that an effort was being made by Mr. Fredericks to distance himself from the official government policy.

Q: That is interesting, in any case Fredericks took a direct interest in what was going on while you were there?

FOULON: Oh, very deeply. He always was very supportive of what I was doing, I had no problem with my relations with him. I think that a question can be raised about his tactics at least in dealing with African leaders.

Q: Did you get the feeling that such instructions as you might have gotten were coming from him in Washington, or at a somewhat lower level?

FOULON: I think any serious instruction was directed by Wayne Fredericks, any routine instructions, no!

Let me go back a bit on the AID question. One of the programs that we had which was basically funded by the US government was helping refugees from South Africa who were coming up on sort of an underground railway through what is now Botswana and crossing the Zambezi River at Chobe I believe is the name, something like that.

Q: Chobe?

FOULON: Chobe, that is it. We worked in collaboration with the African - American Institute and to some extent with the UN in funneling these people and placing them in American universities. It was a melange or a mixture I think of funding involved but it was

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quite a flow of people. This permitted me at times to meet some of the leaders from South Africa and Southwest Africa.

Q: Zambia or Lusaka I should say did have representation of a number of what came to be called freedom-fighter groups from South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Southwest Africa, Mozambique later on. Were those groups there already when you were there as groups, or just individuals, or not at all.

FOULON: They weren't there as freedom fighters. I mean some of the leaders were there and they would obviously consult with the Zambians, but the main operation then was funneling the students through. There were camps out I think southwest of Lusaka, not very far. I remember visiting one a couple of times where these students were housed and processed.

Q: Since there were refugees as you were just mentioning, there must have been a representative of the United Nations High Commission for refugees?

FOULON: Oh yes, run by a fascinating man by the name of George Ivan Smith, an Australian who had been involved with Dag Hammarskjold as his press secretary. I think he had been involved in an incident at your old post.

Q: That is correct, he was involved in an incident involving Lew Hoffacker and the secessionists to capture Smith and Brian Turquhart for reasons best known to themselves; and that Hoffacker was succeeded in rescue if that is correct. I take it that your relations with Smith were very close?

FOULON: Very cordial indeed, we got along very well. George was a real character, you couldn't help but like him. Sometimes a bit histrionic but that helped make him a good character. He headed the UNDP office; also there was Marjorie Weston, who eventually became my wife.

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Q: How nice, so you met her in Lusaka did you?

FOULON: Actually I met her in Dar es Salaam where she was working for the African-American institute at the time.

Q: One last question before we wind up your Zambian experience. You were Charg# for a little while before Ambassador Good arrived. Independence as I recall was in late October of 1964 and when did Good arrive do you recall?

FOULON: He must have arrived in March of 1965 I think.

Q: So you were several months the Charg#?

FOULON: Oh yes, yes I was; three or four really.

Q: Was there anything specific or special that you remember during that period of being Charg#?

FOULON: I think that is when the Tanzam railroad affair arose if I am not mistaken. It came up very early in the independence period and not before.

Q: Looking back now on you experience in Lusaka, what are your most vivid memories and what are you most happy about having accomplished while you were there?

FOULON: I think the real accomplishment, aside from the usual satisfaction with professional performance in relations in rather unusual situations, was simply to be able to build up a post, an embassy that worked well and turn it over to the new and first Ambassador.

I always enjoyed sort of country team supervision and felt that we built that as a start then. What I enjoyed the most, I think that I enjoyed above everything; the country, traveling

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around the bush - I loved traveling around the bush - hunting and meeting people. It was just a marvelous experience, all of it.

Q: Alright, I appreciate all of your time and I'm going to take a little advantage if you will of the opportunity of having a chat with you to ask you a little bit about your early days in the Cameroon. I would like you to comment on the fact that you opened the post there and that you were only one of two official Americans. I shall stop here and go over to the other side of the tape.

Q: Bob, you were our first Charg# in Yaounde in the then trust territory of the Cameroon.

FOULON: First Consul and Principal Officer actually. Independence wasn't achieved until about six months after I had left my post.

Q: That was in the year?

FOULON: I arrived there in 1957, June of 1957 and we opened the post on July 4, 1957 and the country became independent on the first of January 1960, the first of this wave of 1960.

Q: Was July fourth coincidental or accidental?

FOULON: Very purposeful. It was a curious situation as my instructions were to open this post as fast as I could. We actually got it open one month from our arrival. The reason that we broke our necks on this though was at that time in Cameroon, French Cameroon that is, the word independence could not be uttered; it was absolutely forbidden. The Africans were not allowed to print it, the French were not permitted to say it, but everybody knew that it was going to happen.

So I decided that it would be very cute to open the post on the American Independence Day and we put out invitations; talking about the day of independence and so forth, the American independence - in French of course. We invited a nice assortment of French

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and African leaders. Well the French didn't like it but they had to lump it, having helped American independence and recognizing what a cute stunt we had pulled; they did not object at least openly. The Africans came around and thanked us to the skies for having helped them in their battle for independence by opening our post on the Jour de l'Independence.

Q: At that time Cameroon was a trust territory?

FOULON: That is right.

Q: So we had more than a normal interest?

FOULON: The Trusteeship Council would send visiting missions from time to time and the previous one had been headed by an American. Just before independence there was another such visit, again headed by another American. We sort of teleguided the results of this through the normal diplomatic methods.

Q: Can you give us a little insight into some of your early experiences in opening the post and how you conducted American relations with the French basically?

FOULON: Well, when we arrived there most of the French thought that we had come to sell arms to the rebels who were being supplied actually at the time by the Chinese Communists. They were down in two particular tribal areas near the coast. All of this was somewhat promoted by the fact that one of the main tribal areas was the location for the main active areas for American Presbyterian missionaries who had established the first schools in this area; they ran a teachers school and so forth. They were actually being accused by the French of stirring up the African rebellion which was a real African rebellion and people were being killed all the time.

I can remember one of my first real challenges was when then High Commissioner Pierre Messmer, who eventually became Prime Minister of France and was one of the great

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pro-consuls of France, called me in, and while very stiffly sitting behind his desk told me that one of our missionaries would have to leave unless the mission was wise enough to transfer him to another post outside of the rebellious area. This was because they thought and they said that they had evidence, that he had actually harbored the leader of the rebellion, a man named Um Nyobe.

Well, I could see that this was a test for me as well as the missionaries. I jumped into the car and went down to their headquarters and remonstrated with them and plead with them. Fortunately, in order to get better acquainted with them I had just spent a week at a missionary retreat, so I knew them all and I knew how they thought, felt, and so forth. Well they were very reluctant to let the French tell them what to do because they were before the French, and even before the Germans. They felt that this was their country as much as anybody's, but fortunately they did relent and this man was transferred and we avoided the incident; and our relations with the French went up continuously after that.

Q: You mentioned that you had Africans to your opening day ceremony so to speak. Did you also have official, or non-official contact with the Africans at the time?

FOULON: Oh yes, there was actually an African government at the time under something the French called the "Loi Cadre", or the "Framework Law." This allowed the establishment of self-government, very much under French tutelage, but nevertheless it was the beginning of self-government. There was a Prime Minister and there were Ministers of this and that and so forth on whom I called. I subsequently found out that the French made it quite clear to the African leaders and the Prime Minister that it was alright for me to call on them, but that they were not to return the calls nor to entertain me. This persisted for at least six months until there was a new Prime Minister and I managed to get along well with him socially; and we have been good friends ever since.

Q: Six months and a new Prime Minister later, were you able to deal sort of officially with some of the Africans? In other words did the French relent?

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FOULON: Once the French realized that we were there to cooperate and not to create problems and would work with them without trying to undermine French influence, there was no problem at all. The main problem then became relations with the leading Africans, especially the later President, who shortly after the time I arrived, became Prime Minister.

The rivalries being as they always are in most of Africa, if you saw too much of his opposition or questionable people, it was assumed then that you were trying to undermine him. So you had to be very, very careful about this. The result was that during a good part of my two years there, I saw very few Africans except the ones that he wanted me to see, or himself. I would once in a while see somebody else if they came in the office, or maybe one of my officers would.

Q: That African you were talking about who became the first Prime Minister of the Cameroon was named Mbida?

FOULON: I can't remember his first name, but he was from a tribal group right around the capital. As I recall he was a strong Catholic and bitterly opposed by the Northern groups who were dominated by Muslims. He was very shortly replaced by Ahmadou Ahidjo who was the leader of the Northern group, but had enough European experience and education in the south to be able to bridge the differences between the North and the South. Even after I arrived, and much more beforehand, there was a real fear that the North would try to separate from the South.

Q: Your mention of kind of walking a tightrope in dealing with the Africans because of various concerns regarding opposition is a fairly common experience in Africa. Sometimes it has to do with tribalism, sometimes with sectionalism, sometimes with just plain politics. You've already introduced a religious element here. What you tell me sounds like a combination of all four and maybe more?

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FOULON: I think that is absolutely right. I can well remember being lectured by Ahidjo on a trip I made to Cameroon — several trips really — after independence and after I had left my tour there. He always entertained me very cordially at the Palace and at one point he lectured me. He said, “You Americans, you have to realize that all of these parties that you see here in these African countries with different names that seem to reflect European and American kinds of political divisions, those are just names! They are really reflecting other things: political rivalries, tribal rivalries, and even religious ones. That is the nature of the African condition. We have to deal with it and that is why we find useful, at least in the early stages to have single party systems, Le Parti Unique.”

Q: If I remember correctly, there were two Cameroons at the time really; that administered by the French as a trust territory and a part of Nigeria that was the British Cameroons.

FOULON: Cameroon actually was broken into two or three different pieces and one of the great accomplishments of French Cameroon in politics was the union of the two Cameroons. The Communist rebellion was based on this as a leading line, I think it was called L'Union des Peuples Camerounaise or du Cameroon, or the Cameroon Union.

To make a long story short, eventually they had a vote and the main part in the Southern area voted to join French Cameroon and not Nigeria. This astounded the French Cameroonians! They never expected it to happen even though they had been pounding drums for it for years. They were literally flabbergasted, I remember Ahidjo telling me “What do we do now?” They created a bilingual state and a bilingual parliament and pretended to be Federal for a while, though I don't think it is anymore.

I can remember taking a trip from French Cameroon to British Cameroon with my French colleague who was head of foreign relations — or external relations — for the French High Commission and we got to the border and of course we had to start driving on the left side of the road. I instructed my chauffeur to do this, but he couldn't manage it and so I eventually had to say, “Well I'm sorry, I'll drive.” So I drove all the way to Bamenda,

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the capital of the area on the left side of the road. When we got to Bamenda my French colleague and I went to call on the British District Officer. The Frenchman's wife was left in the car and while she was there she overheard the two chauffeurs talking and one was asking the other whether they were still in Africa because the Europeans were speaking a different language and driving on a different side of the road. That was a lot of fun.

Q: Well the Cameroon had an interesting history which lead to the establishment of the trust territory, before World War One it was German. Were there vestiges of the German presence still there while you were there?

FOULON: Oh, a very few. Some of the main residences in Yaounde and Douala had been built by the Germans very skillfully to get a circulation of air through them and so forth. The French High Commissioners palaces in both Yaounde and Douala were German in origin. You would travel around and the old men would still speak a little German, and they would point out this or that hanging tree where the Germans would hang bad boys. It was obvious that the Africans had a great deal of respect for the Germans. They weren't resentful, they just thought that these were real men.

Q: You were in Yaounde, was that much of a city in those days?

FOULON: Oh I guess that it was about thirty or thirty-five thousand people, maybe two thousand Europeans; a pleasant place up in the hills - cool at night, just on the verge of the savanna and still in the tropical rain forest, very damp most of the time - but a very pleasant spot.

Q: Douala was the big city?

FOULON: Douala was the big city down on the coast, a steamy place, it rained everyday with the highest rainfall I think in the world. People who lived there said they began to like it, but I can't imagine why. I always avoided the place as best as I could.

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Q: But it was an international air terminal so to speak?

FOULON: Yes.

Q: It was also the business capital, or was it?

FOULON: Yes it still is I believe. Now subsequently oil has been found in the area and there is a big aluminum smelter not far inland from Douala.

Q: Did we open a post there while you were still in the Cameroon?

FOULON: Not while I was there. There had been a British Consulate in Douala, but it was purely a mundane Consular operation, the British eventually did set up an Embassy in Yaounde.

Q: You said you opened a post literally in approximately a month, that must have been something of a record in American diplomatic annals?

FOULON: Yes, I think it was.

Q: What were your major problems in establishing that post?

FOULON: My major problem was getting hold of a copy of the regulations. They had been shipped months ago. We had been working on the departmental side to make sure that we had everything loaded in there. The regulations did not appear. I had never run a post before and I didn't quite see how I could run one without the regulations.

So I hopped in a plane and went down to then Leopoldville as the Consulate General there was our backstop by which almost all of this stuff had been shipped. I asked the Administrative Officer there and asked, "Where are my regulations?" He said, "I don't know, they haven't come in." He ran one of the sloppiest offices I have ever seen with stuff stashed all over. I happened to look up on a shelf over his head and I said, "Larry are

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those my regulations over there?" He reached up and pulled them down and said, "Oh I guess they are!" So I went happily back with my regulations and opened the post.

Q: Did you have trouble finding a place to open, an office space and that sort of thing?

FOULON: No, no, that had been selected in advance by an advance team. The advance team had also selected a residence which was totally inappropriate so we went out and found another one. We didn't get any furniture in it for about six months then I guess.

Q: Who were you dealing with then on the substantive side back in Washington at the time? There was no African bureau at the time.

FOULON: My Office Director was Vaughan Ferguson and, in all my time out there I never got a single instruction by letter or cable or in any other form, not once. It was a marvelous experience of old-fashioned diplomacy in a situation where you have to make the decisions on the spot. You are Mr. US and nobody is there to tell you anything else. There were a few cases where there were real decisions involved.

Q: Did you get the impression that anybody in Washington was listening to what you had to say?

FOULON: Well I think to some extent, particularly with regard to the Trusteeship Council and the date of independence, and how to play the rebellion, and how to deal with the French. They listened to it quite a bit; I assumed that somebody beyond Vaughan Ferguson had some interest in all of this.

Who was the First Assistant Secretary — Joe Satterthwaite, that's right. He had some interest, but what I wanted to say was in terms of departmental recognition; we did get a post award. I guess it was given the first year we were there and I think that it was the only one given in Africa at the time, not a personal award but for the whole post which I think was quite appropriate. We were very proud of it at the time.

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Q: At that time there were not nearby posts in the Central African Republic, Gabon, Congo; called Congo - Brazzaville?

FOULON: There was an officer who did open a post in Brazza. That is one of the four posts that I had forgotten. He is a man that looked like Joe DeMaggio and I can't remember his name right now. Since he was so close to then Leopoldville he was a much less independent operation and of course there was a Consulate General in Nigeria, but that was about it. There weren't any others around.

Q: Were there logistical problems as far as operating the new office in Yaounde, and indeed just in general living?

FOULON: Indeed there were. I remember not getting a salary check for some three months. I finally sent a wire saying, "I'm going to leave if you don't send me a check!" I eventually did get paid. This was really crucial because we had shipped out a lot of supplies, but for fresh things we had to go to the stores which are French operated, or the African market. My wife found the prices in the French stores absolutely astounding and high, and so I can remember coming home to dinner or lunch a few times with virtually nothing on the table. She said, "Well I just couldn't pay the prices," I said "Well we are going to have to eat!" We had that sort of problem, but nothing really serious. We had, I remember having malaria several times, four times as a matter of fact. The UN had declared Cameroon malaria free, but the missionaries informed me that there were other strains that had not been eliminated and when I started yelling at my secretary, then I should realize that I had better take a pill. So I would take a quinine pill and it would go away, but it was not free of malaria at all! I can remember once my wife trying to cure that, she took too many adenine pills or whatever it was - and went out of her head for half a day. I had to take her down to the missionary hospital to take care of her.

Q: In those days we did not have the medical network in the Department of State that we have today?

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FOULON: No, no way. We had nothing to do, all we could do really was to rely on the missionaries or the French hospitals, which were very good and there was no problem with it at all.

Q: Thinking back now in those days in 1957, what is your fondest memory?

FOULON: My fondest memory is really a very warm relationship with the President Ahmadou Ahidjo, but then Prime Minister, and working with him to achieve a successful outcome in the move toward independence. I can remember that the big question was whether to try to have an election before or after independence, particularly with the rebellion going on and so forth. The French managed to consult with me outside Yaounde. I happened to be on the trip to Douala and the High Commissioner got himself down there and I was just invited for drinks. Before I knew it we were in the most serious political conversation I had there. They were wondering what to do about the UPC, the Communist Rebellion Party. My reaction which I advanced very forcibly — and here is where the real hip-shooting with no instructions whatsoever occurred — I said “Just forget them, just go ahead and achieve independence.” I did raise the question as to whether or not to have an election beforehand, and they were scratching their heads and I was scratching mine and we didn't quite know how to handle this in light of the fact that it had to pass through the Trusteeship Council.

So I went over and saw the Prime Minister Ahidjo and I outlined the problem and told him about our discussions; he hadn't known about them actually. I said “You are going to have to be the judge here, should we have an election beforehand or afterwards?” He said, “Let me think about it and I will let you know.” In about two weeks time he called me back and said, “I think we should just go ahead and then we will have an election afterwards.” So we accepted that and we called in the visiting mission and they made their report, and Cameroon became independent without an election. I don't think the election would have made it, it was not a very Democratic decision perhaps, but probably a very wise one.

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Q: Ahidjo then remained as President for many years in the Cameroon. I take it you not only had good relations with him, but you also found him a very sympathetic individual.

FOULON: I found him very sympathetic, obviously he had to be a bit authoritarian, but I think he was basically a true democrat. He followed American and French political affairs quite in detail, and he ran a very responsible country. He didn't squander a lot of money on himself, or his entourage; he was very modest and tried to achieve development the slow way by fostering agriculture and basic industry. He had no grandiose projects, he cooperated with the European community and the United States, but then kept warm relations with the French even so.

What went wrong later I am not really sure — only rumors to go on. I understand that he was told by a doctor that he was going to die in a year or so and he decided to retire. Once he retired he found out that he was okay, there is some rumor that he tried to get back, but I really don't know the truth of it.

Q: Okay, well I have been interviewing Robert C. Foulon who was our first Chargé in Lusaka in 1965, and who opened our post in Yaounde in the Cameroon in 1957. I have found it a most enjoyable interview Bob and on behalf of both myself and the Foreign Service History Center, I want to express my great appreciation for your candor, and your cooperation, and your help; and I thank you.

FOULON: Thank you for refreshing my memory Art, it was lovely.

End of interview